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their sons or sons-in-law succeeded to the control of their shares. The five Danevi outnumbered the others, forming a unit around which clustered three other members. There was some friction whenever meetings were held, but the minority was easily suppressed by the majority.

Most of the group considered membership an honor, symbolizing wealth and importance. Generally the village approved its existence, as shown by the increasing number of families who sought its services at threshing time.

Twenty-one Dragalevtsy men also belonged to the Animal Husbandry-Dairy Cooperative, with headquarters in Sofia. This group had a twofold aim: (1) to enable members to get animal feed on credit and more cheaply; (2) to develop a milk distributing center. Though Dragalevtsy members did not have regular meetings in the village, most of them attended the annual meeting held in Sofia at which the reports of the officers of the co-operative were read. Before this annual meeting the Dragalevtsy men got together in the village and agreed on common action at the Sofia meeting. Dragalevtsy had one representative on the Executive Committee and one on the Control Committee. These men kept the villagers informed as to the condition of the co-operative. Two or three Dragalevtsy people had resigned recently saying that "there were hidden matters." Most of the men who still belonged said that their membership entitled them to cheaper feed for their animals. I asked ten of the members why they belonged to the co-operative:

"I get cheaper feed through the co-operative."

"I joined in order to work collectively; to have a central depot for milk."

"The co-operative gives credit for food at a lower price."

The agricultural crisis through which Bulgaria had been passing reflected itself in the life of this co-operative. With the hard times, peasants said they did not have enough ready cash for their dues, and so dropped out. However, one could not consider this a true village organization because its physical basis was Sofia, and there was no formal organization operating in Dragalevtsy as a local.

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But peasant prosperity, especially in a village so close to Sofia, was also based on black-market activities. Even in 1945 economists estimated that about ninety-five per cent of all dairy products reached the urban consumer through the black market at prices fantastically high. The peasants, moreover, had learned new ways of circumventing government requisitioning during the war. Just after harvesting, while rye and wheat crops were still in the field, they would shake from one-fifth to one-fourth of the grain onto blankets and secretly hide this amount from the Germans. Then they would, as the law decreed, take the sheaves to the village to be threshed. A part of this threshed grain, varying in amount each year with the size of the harvest, had to be turned over to the authorities at prices fixed by the government, but the previously sequestered grain could be used at home or disposed of at black market prices.

178 437

One additional economic factor of importance[1] was the rise in land values, which surpassed the general rise in prices. For instance, I had not been in the village long before I learned how valuable was the land on the right as one approached the village from Sofia. Within two years the land had gone up ten times, from 35 leva per square meter to 300-400 leva. No wonder then that peasants had been ridding themselves of their debts, selling a field or two if necessary to put them in the clear. Some of the poorer families had been deriving extra income from the earnings of about twenty teen-aged girls who went daily to Sofia to work in the knitting mill. This was a concession to industrialism which the Dragalevtsy peasants would not have made back in 1937, and it was already having some effect upon village life.

178 423

But perhaps one of the greatest economic changes was the reversal of the trend toward dairying mentioned in earlier chapters. Shortly after my departure from Dragalevtsy, a milk producers' co-operative had been established in the village, largely through government prompting and support, and collected all of the milk formerly taken to Sofia by the individual milkmen. The co-operative also ran a grocery store and sold large quantities of feed to the farmers. Owing to price policies of the co-operative and the government price-fixing agency, the peasants began to consider dairying unprofitable. They

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[1] [Following World War II -- Analyst]

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178 234 began to compare the cost of feed with their income from milk and realized that they were losing money. As the war progressed the government bought more and more forage for military animals, feed costs went up, and dairying profits went down. Once this fact became evident and was noised throughout the village there was almost a wholesale withdrawal from dairying. Whereas three or four years before 1,300-1,400 kilos of milk were sold daily, by 1945 only 40 kilos were sold. The 1945 situation was aggravated by the excessively dry season and the reduced yield per cow from 15 liters daily down to 4 or 5. In other words, the number of cows fell off by as much as 90 per cent owing to the low prices of milk and feed difficulties. The peasants liked to mention the fact that *boza,* a fermented millet-seed drink which tastes like sour, liquefied chicken feed, sold for 40 leva a kilo and milk for only 22 leva.

178 233 The loss in dairying, temporary though it may prove to be, meant a corresponding gain in sheep-raising, with 1945 estimates of sheep numbers varying from 12,000 to 15,000. Sheep had also become popular because of the wool they made available for garments in the days of clothing shortage during and following the war. A return to sheep had created interesting social problems connected with pasturing. The sheepmen wanted to go back to the days when sheep could graze freely on uncultivated land, but many of the peasants wanted to keep pasturelands for their own use rather than common use.

178 593 As I talked to the peasants and heard the concerns expressed by the parents and the aspirations voiced by the young, I began to realize that the family trends already under way in 1937 had progressed further than I would have anticipated. Parents, although very much interested, had less to say about the choice of mates for their sons and daughters. Some of them were quite skillful in making use of relatives to advise the young people in choices which the older members of the family group considered wise.

583 178 593 Brides were still stolen but, contrary to the case in former years, the girl could return home immediately if dissatisfied with the man desiring to become her husband. Shortly before I visited the village a young man had "captured" the girl of his choice and taken her to his father's home. When the girl's parents came to ask whether she chose